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SUBJECT: GOF CONSULTING ON ANIMAL CLONING

11. Summary and Background: The French Ministry of Agriculture (MinAg) is currently holding consultations on animal cloning in order to prepare a national regulatory framework on the issue. The MinAg is using the French Advisory Committee on Food (in French, "Conseil national de l'Alimentation", or CNA) for these consultations. CNA has formed a working group on animal cloning, whose members include representatives of the livestock industry, researchers, farmers, the animal genetics industry, consumer groups, the agro-food industry, and lawyers. The working group is conducting a number of hearings, and recently requested a presentation on the U.S. situation on animal cloning from FAS/Paris.

Based on comments of the group, the CNA appears to be leaning towards a conclusion that cloning is not a viable option in France because of animal welfare concerns, and that any products of cloned animals (and very possibly their offspring) would have to be subject to rigorous traceability and labeling requirements. End Summary.

12. At this July 10 hearing, Agricultural Minister-Counselor made a presentation cleared by an interagency group, in which she provided the USG position on animal cloning, a historical background of the U.S. food safety review of animal cloning, the current USDA transition plan, the U.S. view on labeling,, as well as approaches being taken by other countries. USTR rep from Brussels also participated in the discussion.

13. One CNA member expressed doubt that cloned and conventional animals were equivalent based on a recent study published by the UK Food Standards Agency concluding that with animal cloning, there are efficiency and animal welfare problems. He also asserted that there had never been as many animal health problems with artificial insemination and in vitro fertilization as had been encountered with animal cloning. Further, he noted that extremely rare diseases appeared with cloned animals. Other CNA members supported this position. (Note: These conclusions appear in the 2005 French Food Safety Agency (AFSSA) report released on animal cloning. End Note.) Consequently, the group appeared to have come to the conclusion that animal cloning would not be viable in France because of animal welfare concerns. (Note: France is normally not a strong animal welfare advocate given the criticisms aimed at the practice of "gavage" or force feeding of fowl destined for the foie gras industry. End note.)

14. CNA working group members insisted that French citizens' concerns regarding food are not only a question of food safety, but also focus on food production processes. As a result, it seems very likely that they will recommend labeling on food products derived from animal clones and progeny. Also, they disagreed with the U.S. assertion that consumer acceptance increases when their education is higher on technologies, and cited the example of GMOs.

¶5. The CNA is expected to release its final recommendation to the French Government (GOF) on food products from cloned animals and their offspring by next fall. Also, the European Food Safety Agency is expected to release its final report on animal cloning this month (July 2008). The French Presidency of the European Union also proposed a meeting of the European expert group on the Novel Food Regulation, where animal cloning would be addressed (no date has been set yet). The GOF is expected to establish its own regulatory measures on this issue, based on this series of consultations, and on the reviews by European authorities, by the end of this year or in the first half of 2009. It is not clear yet how the French regulation on animal cloning would relate to regulatory decisions taken at the European level. In the absence of an EU regulation, Member State regulations prevail. Even if an EU regulation is published first, France could conceivably argue that it needs a stricter regulation.

6 The following questions were asked by the CNA working group. They request a response by August 15 in order to be able to complete their report:

- How many cloned animals are there currently in the U.S.? (what are their ages and breeds)
- What are the economic and technological benefits of animal cloning? What characteristics are targeted to be improved?
- Is semen from cloned animals currently marketed in the U.S.?

¶7. Comment: Both CNA members and the leading farmers' unions (queried separately) emphasized the downside of introducing cloned animals into France (i.e. anticipated consumer resistance and consequent economic risk). At the same time, they do not see any compelling advantages that would outweigh this risk. Any further

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information on anticipated advantages, particularly for consumers, would be useful, as would be exchanges between U.S. and European livestock producers. End comment.